



I gained much, but not weight

I FELT a bit overwhelmed when starting to draft this article for *The High Sheriff* following the end of my year as High Sheriff of Warwickshire, as there are far too many examples of the wonderful times I had to list them all, so I have limited my comments to a few general observations.

The first two things that sprang to mind were totally personal achievements:

First, I have managed not to put on any weight throughout this gastronomic year – which, I can assure you, was a great feat bearing in mind everyone's generous hospitality. And second, thanks to a lovely official outfit designed by the Royal Shakespeare Company, which I have worn at least three times a week, I have saved a fortune on my clothes wardrobe!

On a more serious note, when I look back over the year I am struck by the fantastic opportunity I was given through being not 'Janet Bell Smith' but the 'High Sheriff'. I have been amazed how warm and welcoming people were all over the county even though they didn't know me at all. The most striking thing about so many of the people I



Kieran McGerty, youth worker, Chris White, MP for Warwick and Leamington and the High Sheriff with representatives of SAFE Youth Club

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met is their unstinting desire to help others. The amount of time and effort contributed in the name of charity and volunteering – without fuss or publicity and with no expectation of any personal return – is exceptional. I was thrilled to receive an email recently from one of the many charities based in Warwickshire, which said 'it is a wonderful feeling when people like yourself positively recognise the work we do, it somehow makes it all worthwhile.' He went on to explain that the raising of awareness of his organisation by the Shrievalty was of real benefit to its profile and had

led to funding from two new sources. The position of High Sheriff gives one a wonderful opportunity to highlight numerous deserving causes.

During this year my respect for the police, other emergency services and the prison service has dramatically increased. I feel we hear and read far too much negative press about them but my year gave me a deeper understanding of the complexity of their role, and the barriers and challenges they have to overcome to deliver a far safer environment for us to live in. It's not just their dealing with crime prevention and emergencies: it is

also how they relate to the community they serve, often in very difficult circumstances.

The grand finale to the year had to be the National Crimebeat Awards held in London in March at which Warwickshire were joint winners. I was so proud to be there to see three young men, who had never spoken in public before, get up and give a presentation, without notes, to an audience of nearly a hundred people.

I have only had a couple of disappointments during the year: first, that as a female High Sheriff I was not allowed to carry a sword at any event and second, that I did not buy a warmer pair of shoes!

Finally, I would say to any incoming High Sheriff – Do make the most of it, it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

♦♦ Janet Bell Smith JP
High Sheriff of Warwickshire 2015-16